

Six international American festivals

From Carbonne Quatorze to Bali: Cak! & Legong

Summary

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**State University Utrecht
Ministry van W V C**

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Introduction

Dutch artists have always been interested in working in the United States. There are numerous successful examples of people who found work as a dancer, film maker or visual artist; who started working on their own or in a more or less famous group; who had success in a production of their own or in a co-production; or who created a furore as a participant in an exhibition or at a festival. Sometimes such working visits were successful, people even returned several times or stayed to work in the US for some time. The examples of the less successful attempts are, understandably, not as well-known.

Often such an undertaking turns out to be less successful than might have been expected on the basis of the energy (and money) invested. Performances have been scheduled in theatres that were too big and too far outside the city, or the marketing failed, as there was too little knowledge about the local particulars.

Often it never reaches the stage of a working visit, as there is too little interest in Dutch art, or so it seems. Not so much because American producers or festival organizers do not believe in Dutch art, but simply because the national and international art that is already being offered is so extensive, that it is very difficult to draw attention among it.

Furthermore, many Americans do not care whether a theatre production or dance performance is from Belgium, Germany or the Netherlands. As bad as that may sound, it is a reality that frequently has to be dealt with in the US. And which will also have to be taken into account, if this art market is to be penetrated. An organizer really uses only one measure: it should be *good*.

Although the (Dutch) international cultural policy could offer a solution to this problem, an American working experience in the past has in many cases given the artists involved nothing but an 'interesting experience'. But one which often was never repeated or continued.

Such things have led to a need to revise the policy with respect to American international cultural affairs. Therefore the Ministry of WVC (Cultural Affairs) has started a three-year experiment in September 1990, by establishing the post 'Cultural Affairs North America' in New York, which more so than before focusses on making contacts between Dutch artists and institutions and (potential) American institutions. The priority is on promoting art and culture from Dutch artists, and not improving economic relations or 'Holland promotion'. The study of the festivals is one example of this new approach.

The study of American festivals, held between May and August 1991, was directed at getting more insight in the comings and goings of festivals with respect to establishing international contacts, and which obstacles play a part in this. The study was focussed on the way in which American festivals function and how the programmes are composed, and under what conditions. This has resulted in a number of recommendations, which could help to improve the relations between Dutch artists and American festivals.

This report of the study consists of three parts. The first part discusses the American cultural

context and some remarkable tendencies, which determine how the festivals function. The second part gives a comprehensive description and analysis of the festivals. The third part finally summarizes, gives conclusions and formulates recommendations. Only the third part is available in English.

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And of course the American Dance Festival, Spoleto Festival USA, Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival, New York International Festival of the Arts, Los Angeles Festival and Festival de Théâtre des Amériques.

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5 Summary and conclusions

Six festivals have been discussed in depth: the American Dance Festival, Spoleto Festival USA, Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival, New York International Festival of the Arts, Los Angeles Festival and Festival de Théâtre des Amériques. This chapter summarizes the most important elements of the festivals. Finally it will provide some conclusions.

5.1 Organization and characterization of the festivals

The analysis of the organization and the character of the festivals was aimed at getting an insight in the way they function, what their aims are and which people have influence on that. The analysis revealed a number of remarkable facts.

American Dance Festival: an international dance festival, focussing on diversity in dance, particularly outside the US (non-European); festival is attracting all sorts of things and is broadening its scope; has attracted many prominent dancers, who also give classes at the school, where young and (semi-) professional dancers take intensive training for 6 weeks. The character and the programming of the festival is to a high extent determined by Charles Reinhart's own preference. They are also determined by the budget and the aims of the festival: giving choreographers a place where they can work and help them along, and conserving and reviving old choreographies. Reinhart is renowned both inside and outside the world of festivals and is in a crucial position in the world of dance, from which he has the possibility to further careers.

Jacob's Pillow: international dance festival; the performances take place during 6 weeks in the summer, but the festival is open 6 months a year; the emphasis is on 'community spirit': working *and* living together in and during the festival. The festival tries to contract and coach a (foreign) group for a longer period (also elsewhere): workshops according to an idea similar to ADF. With its new director Sam Miller the JP appears to follow the same course as previously; together with his staff he determines the programme. This programme shows many resemblances with ADF, but is at a smaller scale and not so well-known abroad.

Festival de Théâtre des Amériques: is one of the younger (theatre) festivals of North America, which managed to build quite a reputation in a short time and has become very popular with festival organizers and visitors, both at home and abroad. The combination of French, Spanish, European and (North) American elements appears to produce surprising results, which are given an extra dimension by the interaction with local groups. Falcon, and also Gladu, are responsible for the programming of the festival and take care of other aspects playing a part in that. The organization is mainly determined by the budget. By the way, it is one of the few festivals that welcome European contributions; possibly even multidisciplinary in the future.

Los Angeles Festival: is a remarkable, internationally orientated, multidisciplinary, multicultural festival, led by Peter Sellars, who is somewhat controversial in the US. To a high extent it is Sellars who decides what happens at the festival. Frisch and Peeps (ass. directors) appear to be the ones who make sure *that* it happens. Considered a sublime festival by some critics -because it is said to succeed in interesting different people from all parts of the city, from all over the world in the 'arts'; typified with less laudatory qualifications by others -as the success the festival pretends to have is not as much as it seems; it still attracts the same people that always were attracted. Attempts to give shape to 'multiculturalism'. LA-Festival attracts a lot of attention from festival directors both at home and abroad.

Spoletto Festival USA: is a more matured international, multidisciplinary festival with an interesting programme; established avant garde mixed with successful crowd pullers, usually an experimental production every year. Not very daring and no clear profile; a clear vision of the contents and development of the festival is lacking. Enjoys quite a good name both at home and abroad. Until recently (mainly) Menotti, Agiris and Redden determined the outlines of the festival together; due to an internal clash Redden (general manager) seems to be cut out for the time being. Future development is rather unclear.

New York International Festival of Arts: is an international multidisciplinary festival, that would suit anywhere; has no very distinct orientation or characteristic; a little bit of everything: limited number of daring productions and well-known European work that has already proven its success over there for a broad public. Spahn (general director) and Segal (chairman) take care of the organization. Officially Melillo was the artistic director; he has disappeared a year before the start of the festival, however. Festival mainly appears to be a marketing instrument in which several institutions in NY participate. In actual fact the festival organization puts out the artistic work to the accommodations that eventually take care of the production. As a result the festival as such has no distinct character.

Is it possible, now, to classify these festivals as *messengers* of and for the American arts; as innovators, trendsetters or followers of trends? In the above it has become clear once more, that it is not simple to determine that. Most festivals go through a development and change gradually or abruptly. The organizers of the festival often have to anticipate ad hoc situations -sponsor withdraws, production is disappointing, internal tension, competition from other festivals- and not every festival is equally prepared to compromise.

At the same time the part/ role of the director -be it the general or the artistic director- appears to be crucial. With exception of the New York Festival, all festivals prove to be led by self-willed directors, who have (or seem to have) very clearly outlined ideas about what they want and thus determine the face of the festival. By the way, it often happens that the (artistic) director is not necessarily a good manager; in those cases that work is done by others, but the reverse also occurs.

In addition to the artistic and/or commercial director, many institutions have an extensive Board of Directors (varying from 10 to 40 people), which sometimes consists purely of people from the

business world. Some Boards are passive, but others take care of sponsoring and act as guarantors for the institution. It happens that the Board intervenes when, for example, the programme is threatening to become a bit too experimental, daring or 'obscene'; the whistle can be blown more easily on the (artistic) director or members may even leave the Board, which can have all sorts of harmful effects on the sponsoring. This indirect influence can have far-reaching consequences.

5.2 Profile and programme of the festivals

Although it is mostly the director who decides on the programme, this does not automatically mean that the festival is good, exceptional, remarkable, daring or innovating. Therefore it is necessary to take a closer look at the programme and the profile of the festivals.

Programme

A number of aspects of the programme appear to determine the profile and the status of the festival. For instance, do festivals use what's already there, or new things, copied from other programmes and parts of other festivals, or do the same festival productions emerge at different festivals? This varies a lot between festivals. Sometimes festivals mainly seem to be a way of prolonging the season, but in as many cases they really try to be 'deviating'.

Although festivals in the US -and particularly the festivals that were visited here- can be regarded more as institutions within the general festival circuit and within specific sectors and disciplines, this does not mean they cannot be innovating or self-willed.

Most festivals at least try to present a number of new things for every festival edition. New to that town, area or the US; innovating within that discipline or between disciplines. Most festivals try to construct their own profile by means of commissions. Sometimes the word 'commitment' is used: people are committed to get a certain production shown. Some festivals feel more or less responsible for those people or that group. Jacob's Pillow goes furthest in this respect: there, groups can work on their production without this necessarily having to result in a performance. They also try to engage and coach groups for longer periods. International (co-)productions and commissions are generally used as a means of familiarizing the public (artists, interested people, presenters) with the unknown. In some cases it may result in an innovation or change of their own discipline.

It is not unimportant, that, depending on the distance to another festival or to another presenter, as much exclusivity as possible is demanded. Festivals have a world premiere or (at least) an American premiere more often than not. This particularly applies to the festival commissions, for which a group gets a special assignment to produce something for a festival. It also applies -though to a smaller extent- to foreign productions or co-productions. In these cases a premiere is virtually always a condition; only in a limited number of situations an exception is made to this rule. In order to 'force' the media to attend the premiere at the festival, sometimes later dates of performance -in cities like New York- are consciously withheld.

Yet this seems to be dealt with in a pragmatic way. Festival organizers are aware of the fact that certain international productions can only come if they make a tour or a series of performances after the performance at the festival. There are even festivals that make

arrangements for this, although there is no financial benefit for the festival attached to it. It is remarkable that certain productions are shown at other festivals only a year later, where they are unblushingly presented as a genuine new discovery.

Networks and contacts

From the art world's point of view the question of a possible follow-up, from a festival to the regular circuit, is quite interesting. For it may open up new perspectives for return or an extended tour.

A follow-up into the regular circuit is certainly one of the possibilities, considering the extensive networks between festivals and between festivals and the regular circuit. The fact that many (well-known) festivals are to be found in the middle of nowhere, does not seem to hinder this process. As stated above, festivals mostly appear to be established institutions with a well-known reputation. Therefore it does not make much of a difference that the festivals do not take place in one of the cultural capitals. The media, critics and presenters will come to the festival anyway. Virtually everybody knows each other.

Most festival directors frequently visit each other, to see what is going on and whether there are new developments to be expected. This happens frequently among the 6 festivals studied, but also with other American festivals and festivals outside the US. Likewise between festivals and diverse accommodations of a particular character. Such (actual) visits are restricted, however, by the fact that most of the festival directors have their own festival in the summer; just like the others. Contacts between festivals, between presenters and festivals, but also between presenters and artists, are often consciously stimulated at the festivals. Some festivals are better suited for this than others, with respect to scale, and physical and social distances.

The networks that are drawn from them, are often determined by earlier working circles, assignments or collaborations. Which surfaces in the co-productions that the festivals have amongst themselves and with all kinds of (mainly) American institutions. Only the ADF and, to a smaller extent, Spoleto have co-productions with institutions abroad. Festival de Théâtre des Amériques does not exclude international co-productions, but states that it sometimes is too difficult financially (too expensive).

5.3 The prestige of the festivals

In order to get at a better understanding of the American festival market, an attempt has been made to determine which festivals stand where within the American festival circuit. An attempt has also been made to analyse the position of festivals in relation to the regular circuit.

The profile of a festival is mainly determined by the character of a festival, which in turn is determined by, amongst other things, the kind and type of programme. The prestige is determined by the opinion and the judgement of (authoritative) critics and presenters, but indirectly also of the public, with regard to the quality of that programme.

Although this gives some insight, it is impossible to draw up a guideline on the basis of which the prestige of just any festival could be determined. From the description of the six festivals it once again appeared that the concept of prestige -in spite of more insight- cannot easily be determined. As far as the six festivals studied are concerned, three groups may be distinguished.

Spoleto and NYIAF have a prestige which is mainly determined by the amount of money they

have, the programme with big names they can draw up with it and the fact that others (the business world and other prestigious institutions) are prepared to link their name to them. Spoleto enjoys a good reputation in Charleston, with other international festivals and with institutions like the BAM, Walker Art Center and several foreign institutions. But nowadays less so with, for instance, the (professional) press.

The prestige of the NYIFA is less clear; many sign their name to the festival -especially for the money and the marketing, so it seems- but do not express that very openly. The business world and, for instance, American Express value (the prestige of) the festival. Despite the fact that the festival events are not appreciated for their 'being a festival', newspapers like the New York Times and the Voice have received the performances for the 1991 festival with great enthusiasm.

The prestige of American Dance and Jacob's Pillow appears to be more closely linked with the (possible) quality of what is being offered and the people (directors, teachers/dancers) involved. Both festivals are regarded as virtually unthreatened modern dance festivals in the US, which also succeed in explicitly setting the scene for modern dance outside the festival circuit. New developments and influences from other continents are shown at the festivals. These positions of course are not static¹.

The prestige of the Festival de Théâtre des Amériques and the LA-Festival constitute the third group. The LA-Festival is presently famous and notorious as a result of the (controversial) qualities of its director, Peter Sellars as artist and as manager and the way in which the course and the programme have been changed. Some people in the art world, in the national festival circuit and in LA explicitly do or do not wish to sign their name to this. By some festivals the LA-Festival is considered the shining (future) example of the development of festivals in general.

The Festival de Théâtre des Amériques can count on hardly any local -financial- support. But the festival has a remarkably high number of visitors from Montréal itself. In the international festival circuit the festival has managed to build a status of scene-setting, daring and 'new' in a very short time.

It should be pointed out that a profile, the prestige and the significance of it are constantly changing. Not only the festivals change with respect to contents or direction (profile), but also the way in which a certain prestige is appreciated changes.

Ten years ago an American festival had a high status if it featured a lot of European work in its programme. But such a profile is not popular with the trendsetters anymore nowadays. So the prestige of a festival can change for certain groups. The profile of *eurocentrism* has to be dropped and everybody has thrown themselves at Eastern Europe. Now the attention shifted already to China, Southern Europe and Indonesia. Thus a new profile is established and possibly the prestige with others secured.

Personal taste, fashion and other personal preferences and dislikes and a certain pragmatism play a more important role than is generally assumed. Work from Western Europe has been

¹ Frequently there is talk of the rise of a third, the Colorado Dance Festival; Nouvelle Dance in Montreal also enjoys a certain prestige.

losing interest recently (except for the Festival de Théâtre des Amériques), or at least that is the official statement. Nevertheless the programmes of most of the festivals prove that (Western) Europe still enjoys much attention, if only for the fact that money for the arts is available to a higher extent over there.

From this it may be concluded that the way festivals distinguish themselves or acquire more status, is not determined by the festival management only. No matter how good a director is, how good the programme looks or how perfectly it has been organized, there still is no guarantee that it will be a 'good' festival with prestige within its discipline or the festival circuit. It all appears to be related to factors that can not or only partly be influenced. How about such an intangible thing as atmosphere?

For instance, is the FTA so popular because Falcon is so nice and engaging, and visibly embodies the festival for the entire public every night? Does Spoleto find so much support because Charleston symbolizes everything most Americans have to miss the rest of the year, strengthened by the Italian 'mysticism' of the maestro? Has the LA-Festival, despite the criticism and setbacks, partly succeeded in getting something going or establishing something in LA? Keeping in mind that LA is one of the most difficult cities to organize such a festival in: the city is very dispersed, many people are scared of (supposed) insecurity in advance and people simply do not like to travel to an unknown neighbourhood. Is the American Dance really all that different from Jacob's Pillow with regard to the programme, or do some people (co-workers) choose for Reinhart's charisma or the 'community spirit' of the Pillow? How is it possible that the NY Festival forms a very special 'entity', despite the fact that it hardly shows resemblance to a 'real' festival and that virtually the same people who take care of the programmes on the stages through the rest of the year also do this for the festival?

5.4 Financing of the festivals

For the largest part of their revenues, most of the festivals, except for the Festival de Théâtre des Amériques, depend on sponsoring, funds, individual donations, the National Endowment and, to a smaller extent, subsidies. The so-called *contributed income*. Their own revenues from selling tickets, memberships and revenues from selling t-shirts, books, programmes (merchandising) provide the rest; *earned income*. Generally the own revenues mostly constitute the largest part of the total income and a small portion is covered by subsidies (25% from the government at the most).

The six festivals, however, seem to have a situation which is exactly the reverse of that; the part of contributed income (private financing and subsidies) is larger than that of earned income (own revenue). For a large part this is related to the fact that it would be easier to be granted subsidies for a festival. In addition to that, sponsors appear to be more inclined to support festivals. The Board of Directors, consisting mainly of top people from the private sector, quite often manages to extract high amounts of sponsoring, donations and guarantees and make hole-and-corner arrangements that otherwise would take more time and money.

Furthermore so-called Friends of the Festival often provide (unpaid) volunteers who shift a lot of work. Thus the costs are kept low and extra income is brought in (selling t-shirts, accomodations for guests).

The total budgets of the six festivals vary quite a bit; from about 2 million to over 6 million

dollars².

It is remarkable that there is so much variation in the ticket prices for performances at the NYIFA (depending on the kind of accomodation and the price they normally charge), as well as the differences within one performance, as frequently seen at Spoleto (opera costs between 8 and 40 dollars). The ticket prices are somewhat high, when compared with similar performances in the regular circuit or the accomodations used.

Many festivals have an older, white audience with rather great purchasing power, which probably is not scared off by the relatively high prices. When the festivals are held in smaller towns, visitors furthermore have to count on the costs of accomodation, which can run pretty high. The assumption often expressed in Europe that (certain) festivals break down barriers, because festival performances are quite often less costly, does not apply to most cases (studied here) in the US. Although special rates for students have been spotted incidentally, it remains unknown whether this has actually led to a larger participation of this group.

Tabel I Budgets Festivals 1990-1991

At most of the festivals quite a lot of performances were sold out, with the exception of the LA Festival. Yet 70% of the performances at the LA Festival were free, but enormous amounts of money had to be put down for performances taking place in theatres. Although many performances were free, this has not drawn a substantial

<u>Budgets '90-'91</u>		<u>Ticket prices*</u>
ADF	1.9 mln A.\$	5-20\$
JPD	2.0 mln A.\$	22-28\$
LAF	6.0 mln A.\$	7-80\$A/free
NYI	6.5 mln A.\$	12-35\$A/free
Spo	5.5 mln A.\$	20-32\$A
FTA	2.0 mln C.\$	20-22\$C

Source: Programs of the festivals

*: extreme peaks, either high or low, have been omitted

group of 'new' public (which normally would, for whatever reason, not come). A survey taken among the public will have to shed some more light on this.

The NYIFA also had a great number of free events, which did draw a lot of people. This mostly involved events that were not actually 'new', but in fact were other festivals -taking part in the NYIFA in 1991- that had already been there for a much longer time, but were given financial support by the festival this year.

It is unknown whether visitors of free events (eventually) also end up at paid events (the reverse is often the case).

Considering the present economic and social developments in the US -as described in Chapter 2-, in the future more pressure points are to be expected concerning government financing and commercial sponsoring, particularly in the light of the present economic recession.

² It would be interesting to find out why these budgets show such enormous differences and what exactly is done (differently) with them.

5.5 Audience and Media

Most of the festivals combine a local/regional -enthusiastic and ever returning- audience with a small, select, mostly national and international audience. The non-local public, by the way, often consists of nothing but people from newspapers, magazines, television and radio and other festival organizers, presenters and producers from the US and abroad. For the festival this small but select group of visitors is of vital importance strategically, in order to fulfill the expectations of sponsors, but also to keep a broad group informed and interested. Thus it is possible to reach a potential new public of visitors and financiers. The American Dance, Montréal and NY International Festival of the Arts have a distinctly regional public, with a very broad international circle on the outside. There are no data about the public at the LA-Festival. Spoleto hardly has a regional market and is dependent on the entire US, New York and interest from abroad. Jacob's Pillow is in a tourist area with many visitors from the entire region between the East Coast and Chicago, but has less of an international orientation.

The marketing of the festival is usually essential to reach the target groups -although it is not always clear what the target groups exactly are-, but not all festivals have the same amount of money to spend on it, or wish to spend the same amount. Furthermore some festivals appear to have a better strategy than others. This depends on the target groups, the area and the context the (potential) public is in and which market the festival thinks it can draw from.

Jacob's Pillow is in a tourist area, about which it is known a lot is going on in the field of culture; often this is -in addition to nature- the prime reason to go there. Marketing the festival in the wide area of origin of the tourists seems rather useless. In the area itself there are several publications concerning the festival, and in addition to that it gets a reasonable amount of attention from the regional and national media. Prior to the festival there is an opportunity to follow short introductory courses in order to 'be able to understand more of the festival', which can also be regarded a marketing effort. It appears not too much time and money are spent on marketing, as the (regular) public will show up anyway.

The same roughly applies to the American Dance Festival. The festival, which is located in a cultural desert, provides a supply of dance the regional population has to live on for an entire year. The festival is known by a large group of people and appears to have a loyal public. Therefore the basic thing to do is to maintain contact with the public during the interval between two festivals. In addition to the work the many volunteers do, they also take care of the necessary trait d'union between festival and region. The festival fliers can be found in many places.

The Festival de Théâtre des Amériques is mainly directed at the local and regional population - also with respect to marketing- and appears to reach it, too; furthermore there is a reasonable amount of attention from the media. The idea that so-called people from the neighbourhood will come to see art in the neighbourhood centres, seems too optimistic. The poster used for the festival in 1991, for instance, provided no single clue that it involved a theatre festival. The poster, a large picture of a rain forest, referred to the environment rather than the theatre.

The LA-Festival tries to involve the entire local/regional population in the festival and has to overcome all kinds of geographical and social barriers to achieve that: travelling from one side of the city to the other, go to neighbourhoods you normally never come, going to stages that are not known as theatres and getting acquainted with artforms not everybody recognizes as such. It is a fact that the marketing of the festival has been underestimated and has not run smoothly, and in addition to that the leading local newspaper, the LA Times, has definitely not been supportive.

For Spoletto, for instance, it is useless to wage a regional marketing campaign, as its target groups come from all over the country. In such a case a mailinglist, in addition to much attention from the media, is much more effective and cheaper. A great number of free tickets are made available for festival organizers, presenters, the press and the like.

The NY International Festival finds itself in a context where, so to speak, art can be enjoyed in plenty every hour of the day -even during the summer. Several festivals take place at the same time, which makes it hard to reach the target groups -as they perceive them. They are aimed at young people, but it is uncertain whether they actually reach these; posters could hardly be seen in the streets, tickets could practically only be ordered by credit card and this had to be done at the separate stages of each performance. Yet a large part of the budget is spent on marketing.

The amount spent on marketing shows great differences between the festivals. Spoleto, for example, spends approximately 11,000 dollars on marketing and the NYIFA almost 2,000,000 dollars! The latter -as described above- in fact functions like a giant marketing machine.

5.6 Conclusion

The study of the six festivals within a relatively short span of time, May-August 1991, clearly points out two things.

First, it is possible to understand and fathom several festivals -even in a short time. On the basis of the aspects discussed above it is possible to get a preliminary impression of the festival and to consider whether the festival could be 'suited' to perform at when matters like profile, programme, networks, prestige, financing, marketing and the like are taken into consideration.

Second, the study also undeniably shows that some aspects just cannot be properly assessed in advance. Although in many cases this is also the advantage of a festival, unpleasant surprises can bring along farreaching consequences. Some festivals look challenging and intriguing on paper, the organization is helpful in every possible way and the theatres are sold out every time.

Still, on the spot it may turn out that certain kinds of humour do not work or even are completely misunderstood; that the public mainly comes to the festival out of habit, but is definitely not waiting for the unexpected; or that the accomodations are totally unfit for what you want to present. Particularly in this, aspects like the atmosphere, character of the festival, efficient marketing, contact with the audience, the programme, local context and cultural infrastructure, previous programmes and the reactions of the public and the media on them, play a role that can only be predicted to a limited extent. And sometimes the weather will just not

work along!

Though such conclusions can naturally also be made for European festivals, it is a fact that possible pressure points or surprises are more easily solved within the European context; if only because in Europe the absolute -but definitely also the relative- distances are smaller. It is also characteristic for this that in Europe cultural differences are taken into account, whereas the US are often considered one homogenous entity. Such an attitude can cause many disappointments. Furthermore it should be noted that (prestigious) festivals are virtually always for a large part dependent on external financing. Apart from being good, intriguing, new and surprising, the programme also has to be *marketable*. Not only marketable to sponsors and supporters, but also to the media, the public, the local politics or the NEA. A situation with rather farreaching consequences for productions about sensitive topics or productions in which the actors openly violate the new rules of the NEA, for example.

Ideally, festivals should be the places where the new, the unexpected, or the spontaneous can fully bloom. American practice proves this is not as much the case as it should be. Festivals appear to be places where the illusion is created that *anything goes*, but it remains to be seen how this can be realized in reality.

6 Recommendations

Experiences and adventures by now have shown that there is little point in simply making Dutch productions or performances better-known in the US. There also has to be mutual curiosity, this curiosity has to be aroused and more attention should be paid to pointing out the multiform quality of what the Netherlands have to offer. Therefore it was necessary to acquire more insight into the way this can best be dealt with. This report, and this chapter in particular, provides concrete directions and recommendations.

6.1 Introduction

This study has provided more insight in the way these six festivals could serve as possible 'presenters' for Dutch artists and in the way American (including Canadian) festivals roughly function with respect to organization, networks, financing, programming and the like. This latter could serve as a point of departure for the preparation of an approach of festivals by individual artists, groups, arts institutions or WVC (the Dutch Ministry of Welfare, Health and Cultural Affairs). The aim of the study was to see whether the US are aware of what the arts of the Netherlands have to offer, why (not), how this situation could be changed or improved, what is necessary to achieve that and how it will work in practice (both in the short term and in the long term).

The case study descriptions show that there are many similarities, but just as many differences between festivals that appear to be similar at first sight. This has consequences with respect to approaching the festivals and possibly also for the opportunities for Dutch artists. Some recommendations have been formulated on the basis of the study with regard to approaching the

festivals concerning possible Dutch participation.

The image of Dutch art will be discussed shortly. After that directions will follow that could possibly lead to a growth in the participation of Dutch groups in American festivals.

6.2 The image of Dutch art with American festivals

Before formulating conclusions on the basis of an inventory regarding the familiarity of Dutch art (art here includes everything related to theatre, music, opera, or multidisciplinary artforms), some aspects have to be explained first.

Several (Dutch) artforms are very well-known on a large scale in America. Not only Rembrandt, Mondriaan or Van Gogh; the National Dance Theatre or the National Ballet, but also less famous artists. Often people in the American arts know that the Dutch government has - relatively - a great deal of money available for the arts. Furthermore most festival organizers know about the Holland Festival; 'Interesting, but local', 'you go there for ideas and to see friends, but definitely not to do business'. It looks as though familiarity with productions or groups just after the best-known -sometimes called the second or third circuit- is fragmented and often is a coincidence. However, they are not always known as 'Dutch'.

Yet in most American gift shops, souvenirs shops and postcards shops in every self-respecting city or seaside town and even in the most rural areas, the smallest Dutch art objects can be found: the postcards of Art Unlimited (Amsterdam) and Catch (Utrecht). At the moment this is the most visible and widespread Holland promotion imaginable. What is striking here is the (apparently) efficient distribution channels and marketing situation, which have contributed to a very widespread network of the market for these cards³.

In addition to that 1991 was the year of the American breakthrough for Dutch pop music. The Urban Dance Squad -compared to Living Color and Fishbone by NYT- and saxophone playing Candy Dulfer enjoyed a growing popularity. Just like the films *Spoorloos*, *De Wind* and *Abel*, which played at least in New York. According to the New York Times the film *Spoorloos* (The Vanishing) was very successful.

These examples point out once more, that it is not necessarily about Dutch productions, but about products that happen to come from the Netherlands. This may be regrettable, but it is also a fact in the approach of the American market. Perhaps it is possible to change something about that, if so desired.

What was striking, was that films like *Spoorloos* (The Vanishing) or *Abel* (The Voyeur) were easily interpreted in a wrong or unparallelled way. Although the articles in the NYT or the Voice were inclined to moderately positive reviews, it was striking to see how often they fell back on ineradicable clichés like Calvinism or windmills & tulips. Which probably has not done the films much good in interesting a broader public or a bigger distributor.

This example shows that many things can go wrong with bringing out a production on the American market. In spite of a good preparation. Before, during and after many mistakes can

³ There may be some elements in this that could be interesting for other (art/design) forms.

be made, which are often based on ignorance. Without being present full-time in America and seeing a lot, it is impossible to fully understand the rapidly changing American (festival) market (see 5.6). A lot of time, energy and money is lost, because in reality the festival was different than was expected; a wrong presenter had been chosen; the accomodation was too large; or the visa did not arrive in time.

A project can fail, because it is not clear 'what is meant by the production or the project'. Such mistakes and experiences can be avoided if there is more knowledge about the local situation and if such a project gets better supportive information (in the programme, for instance). In other words: the preparation and presentation of a Dutch production can still fail at the last moment, if it has not been marketed well before and during the festival. For that extra information and documentation is needed (explanation), as well as a press conference or adequate marketing. Sometimes the solutions are very simple. With many non-European productions at the festival, for instance, it is almost standard procedure to give extensive information about the (cultural/historical) background of the production in the programme or in the press report. It seems no luxury to also do this for Dutch art productions like films, plays or literature (in which the text and the language play a more important role than just the image, the movement or the music).

Furthermore the importance of marketing is often underestimated; distances are larger in the US, both literally and figuratively, and that has consequences for the possibilities of attracting public and the media. The marketing of a Dutch production (within a larger whole or a festival) deserves more attention, either from the group itself or from its intermediary. Sometimes it is necessary to convince the festival of this once more. Sufficient information should be presented not only in a striking, but also in an efficient way. Through press, professional magazines or programme, since it is crucial for the success of the project.

Finally it must be said that it appears as though it is (or has become) too much dependent on the efforts of a single person in the Netherlands whether or not an international (co-)production, performance or trip goes through. If that person drops out, all experience and contacts acquired disappear with him or her.

6.3 Possibilities for Dutch participation: a matter of inquiring

In previous chapters the great diversity among festivals has been established. Apart from the fact that this variation also has consequences for possible participation in a festival -some festivals are interesting for certain groups and not at all for others- several main lines have emerged from the study, which are of interest for a festival approach in general.

Most importantly of all, the points of departure for a policy in this should be based on agreement. This study has shown that when a so-called 'Holland promotion' is used as a policy in the approach of the festivals, little result is to be expected from the efforts. Festivals are interested in (certain) Dutch productions, but not because they are Dutch. Some directors indicate that they do not care much whether something comes from Belgium, Germany or the Netherlands; as long as it is *good*.

However, when increasing the (possibilities for the) marketing of Dutch art products is put first, instead of pure Holland promotion, better results are to be expected. This kind of effort can be much better directed than the random promotion of the Dutch film or the Dutch theatre.

Productions or groups that want to or can work in the US, often still have to be discovered however, and can use some help with that. The festival study shows that most of the festival organizers know something about Dutch productions or groups. Some can give names, others have had a Dutch group on their programme in the past, but in practically all cases it appears to have been a once-and-only event.

Apart from that they are insufficiently aware of what is so special or particularly good from the Netherlands. Festivals could be made aware of the Dutch art product, where they can 'get' it, under which circumstances and how collaborations can be established, but that will be a very costly matter, and probably the return will be little.

A more important fact is that most organizers lack contacts and continuation of these contacts, because of which it usually does not go beyond a once-only contact.

Apart from that there are so many other countries where things are produced and the choice is often determined by what happens to be offered, what the organizers have seen or heard themselves somewhere, often at another festival in America or Europe, what has been recommended by one of the contacts and (very importantly) for what financing can be found.

It is striking that festival directors say that it does not matter very much where a production comes from -although Western Europe has become less popular lately- but that they are willing to be convinced of the opposite. If the Dutch art product is really that good, they want to be told so and see it with their own eyes. A certain degree of pragmatism is not foreign to their nature, since most know that the financing of projects with countries like France, Great Britain or the Netherlands is more easily realized than that of projects with Poland, Indonesia or India.

6.4 Information, contacts and follow-up

On the basis of these data recommendations have been formulated, which in fact consist of three connected stages. Firstly, targeted information is important. Secondly the contact between festivals and Dutch productions, groups and institutions needs improvement and thirdly a follow-up of the contacts is needed in order to increase the continuity.

1. Information in the US

The festival directors clearly point out that good information is of vital importance. Often the organizers lack sufficient, recent information and do not know about the latest developments. In talks with the organizers they explicitly stated that they would appreciate a permanent (Dutch) intermediary in the US, who could help them get on their way with introductions, who could tell them what is *good* and why a certain production or group is good. Naturally this person would maintain close contact with the Netherlands himself (too) in order to keep informed about new and special developments. Some interviewees speak of the benefit of the people at the consulate or the embassy, but the level of that contact is often (too) limited for the organizers, as the cultural attachés have little specific knowledge of the profession or the discipline. Resorting to French or German contacts is a logical step to take in that case, since it is easier to make contacts in the US through well-known cultural institutions like the *Goethe Institut*.

2. Making and simplifying contacts in the Netherlands

Too many obstacles stand in the way to get into contact with Dutch groups, which almost exclude a Dutch choice in advance. Festival directors simply do not go to the Netherlands unprepared to see if there is something exceptional or special offered there. Some festival directors have had someone to help them with that in the past⁴, or they have been to the Holland festival, but this appeared to be insufficient reason to go further in that direction on a large scale or on a regular basis. Once a festival wanted to contract a Dutch group, but got no reply at all, despite repeated requests.

It appears festival directors know nobody or too few people, do not know the way(s), do not know where to start, who to get in contact with and how to operate as efficiently as possible.

The logical step to take is to create some clarity in this matter. The best way for this would be to point institutions that are already operating in this international field, at the lack of information about the ins and outs of the Dutch art world and supplementary information about Dutch productions and contacts; which would have to be revised and supplemented regularly.

3. Follow-up and a permanent contact in the Netherlands⁵

Although activities may be set up efficiently from the US to reach a fruitful collaboration, it will never get beyond good intentions if there is no, no good or a halfhearted response from the Netherlands. Obviously, when contact has been made with certain festivals in America, at the same time agreements must be made in the Netherlands, in cooperation with one or more institutions that already play a part in that now, to find out how these new or renewed contacts can best be elaborated. After a possible American fact-finding mission to the Netherlands it is of the utmost importance for the continuity that contacts, collaboration or possible contracts are carefully rounded off, continued, and that the American festivals are frequently informed.

The festivals must be able to rely on a permanent intermediary in the Netherlands to help them further or to make it easier to make contacts in future. Perhaps this could be a task for the Nederlands Theater Instituut (Netherlands Theatre Institute), International Affairs, which already takes care of part of such matters. Although the American market has been slightly underexposed so far, it still appears that the NthI is reasonably informed about what is going on there.

As a matter of fact, such a service could at the same time work the other way round; as a place where information about American art institutions is collected, kept up-to-date, so that interested parties in the Netherlands could find out through a kind of data base which festivals they could aim for and whether perhaps contacts already exist (and with whom). Requests from America for productions could also be collected like this.

If the organizers actually want to programme one or more productions, most of them will want to see them for themselves in advance. Some festivals demand to see work of a production unit

⁴ Ritsaert Ten Cate is frequently mentioned, but also Marc Jonkers, Jan Riezenkamp, Michiel de Rooy or George Brugmans.

⁵ This does definitely not, by the way, exclude a collaboration with Belgium.

or group that will be brought out in the future, if such work exists; to get some idea about the continuity of the group's quality. Though videos are interesting for a first introduction, no choice is made on that basis alone. Furthermore it will be necessary that the production is made in English (Montréal: also French).

So it is important that festival organizers who may be interested come to the Netherlands to see things with their own eyes.

Programme for festival organizers

Several festival organizers have indicated that to arouse their interest and to seriously consider participation of Dutch groups or productions, it is essential that they see several festivals, and performances and meet several people in the Netherlands.

Furthermore, festival organizers have indicated that they want to visit the Netherlands, if a balanced cultural programme has been organized for them -comparable to the activities in this field by the British (Arts) Council and the French Arts Council. Naturally after consultation and with their own specific focusses and preferences, in which they can spend their time as efficiently and effectively as possible.

Explicitly *after consultation*, as the separate festivals all have their own preferences, financial means, restrictions or preconditions (budgets, dimensions and type of accomodations, public, co-productions, tour, premiere demands). Not all festivals are equally prepared or able to take risks, which naturally has consequences for sectoral preferences, the type, kind or scale of the production and the financial possibilities.

A visit to the Netherlands of a week or 10 days would be interesting, to make contacts and see what is going on. A tight programme is preferred, with visits to at least 7 performances at or outside festivals, possibly seeing rehearsals and talks with the people of the productions themselves -what they want or what their plans for the future are. In addition to that, they want suggestions for meeting certain (important) presenters, producers, festival organizations, or intermediaries; and with those some basic agreements should already have been made.

Visitors want to spend their time as well as possible, and therefore practical matters, like tickets, hotel reservations, transport and perhaps guidance, must be well taken care of in advance. If possible there should be somebody in the Netherlands they can rely on at all times.

6.5 Finally

Considering everything, it can be said that the festival study has revealed several characteristics of the American festival world and also has provided insight into ways to improve the Dutch policy with respect to American festivals. Despite these recommendations there are still some snakes in the grass, which are so tightly woven into the Dutch arts policy (in the Netherlands) that they cannot be nullified, simply because they are not favourable for the international policy. In relation to this, the director for Cultural Affairs North America, Van der Lugt in New York City, pointed out that, in spite of all good intentions and recommendations, there may be a critical point in the Dutch (theatre) situation. For Dutch groups in many cases have to present 1 or 2 theatre productions a year, after which the old (also successful) programme disappears. Foreign groups on the other hand, sometimes play the same production for years on end. So the possibilities to continue a production or bring it out again at a later stage, appear limited, if a

Preface

One of the key elements of the policy pursued by the Ministry of Welfare, Health and Cultural Affairs is to ensure that only events which have a reasonable chance of success are presented abroad. There is of course little point in producing work in other countries if there is no demand for it. Nor is there any point in organising performances at venues which have no prestige and which offer no prospect of a performance having a lasting impact. The object is to present Dutch cultural events to a wider public and stimulate interest in what the Netherlands has to offer. Only then is it worthwhile for both the makers and the producers to present their work abroad.

Working for a different audience is no less important than working in a different professional environment. Contact with artists, producers and programme-makers in other countries is of great value in contributing to the uniqueness and development of the arts in the Netherlands.

The United States of America has long provided a significant frame of reference for art in Europe, and vice versa. Dutch artists and ensembles have also played a role in this context. That it is sometimes difficult to penetrate the American market is due to the fact that there are substantial differences in the way the "art market" operates on either side of the Atlantic, and that these differences are not always sufficiently understood.

Which American theatres and festivals are the most prestigious? What is the best way of getting a foot in the door? How do the arts networks function in the United States? These are the questions that Dutch artists and producers have to confront. At the same time, one should bear in mind that the American public is on the whole highly receptive to Dutch cultural events.

This report examines a specific segment of the American art market and addresses such questions as the popularity of Dutch art, the willingness to schedule Dutch productions, as well as some of the factors which play a role in determining the preference for certain types of production.

To my mind, the study has proved successful. Not because it will answer all your questions or provide the blueprint to guarantee a successful tour, but because it surveys the wide diversity of programme-makers and producers in the United States and illustrates their differences in approach. Furthermore, it underlines the fact that a positive and active stance is of the essence, and that only with confidence in our own abilities can we function successfully in the American market.

W.S. van Heusden,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'W. van Heusden', followed by a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Director for the Arts.

new production is scheduled, the actors have gotten other obligations and sometimes already work elsewhere. If an (American) festival is interested in a certain production (while in practice the production can be presented at the festival after at least 1 or 2 years), it often means that the group will (have to) bring a different production at the festival or that it will be extremely difficult to realize such a production in the US. In that case it remains to be seen whether a festival will still be that interested.

Although some initiatives are being taken to strengthen the bond between Dutch artists and the US, it can be nullified again very quickly when cuts or a change of policy make people think it has to be done differently. It is time, and it is necessary that there is more certainty about that for a longer period, in order to be able to establish a policy and a strategy in the US and the Netherlands.

These were the most important general conclusions of importance for an effective approach of these and other festivals in the light of the American international cultural c.q. festival policy. It is obvious that the American festivals contain a wealth of information, excitement and sensation, and that it is 'only' a matter of winnowing the chaff from the grain. The festivals discussed in this study at least show that *this* is not simple and that an effective approach of these and other festivals is closely linked to a good preparation before and after; both in America and in the Netherlands. And it is exactly this that may still need some work to convince everybody that it is a good approach.

Personal hobbies may have to come second, old pains will have to be forgotten and cooperation will have to come first in order to reach a more effective method. To strengthen the bond between Dutch artists and the US, the image of Dutch art will have to go beyond tulips and delftware.